The RECONSTRUCTIONIST

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the Reconstructionist

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EDITORIALS

FOR A UNITED APPEAL FOR HIGHER JEWISH EDUCATION

THE establishment of the state of Israel will not necessarily create a revival of Judaism in America. There are many who claim that it may have the opposite effect. The argument runs as follows: Large numbers of American Jews have remained loyal to Jewish life because they believed that the survival of Judaism depended to a great extent upon them. They accepted the obligation so long as no other group of Jews could be counted upon to do so. Now that Eretz Yisrael is a reality, they are absolved of that responsibility. The future of Judaism is assured; now they can proceed to assimilate.

To be sure, there are thousands of American Jews who disagree with this line of argument. They contend that assimilation is not, and has never been, either an honorable or a feasible course for American Jewry. They believe firmly in the possibility and the desirability of a creative and healthy Jewish life in the diaspora in general, and in America in particular. They insist that the establishment of the Jewish state means that—so far as domestic Judaism is concerned—American Jews can now gradually transfer their energies and their means from the tasks of relief, rescue and rehabilitation aboard to the task of revival and reconstruction at home.

Further, they see in the new Jewish homeland a source of inspiration and culture for the Jewish communities *hutz la-aretz*. Once the leaders and the people turn from philanthropy to culture and religion, they will necessarily have to turn toward the center of the Jewish world for much of their content. This is no reflection upon the creative capacities of American Jews, but merely a corollary of the inescapable fact that the conditions of Jewish life in the diaspora are not created by Jewry but mainly by the predominant non-Jewish majority.

Those who belong to the second category, namely, those who see a future for Jewish life here in terms of religion and culture, must therefore begin to consider how they are going to effect the swing toward those interests. Until today, the religious and educational institutions of the country have been receiving a mere pittance from the hundreds of millions of dollars expended each year by American Jews for Jewish causes. A revival of religion and culture will cost money, and, sordid as it sounds, the religious and educational leaders will have to work out methods of redirecting Jews' generosity toward their institutions.

The trend of events alone will not do

the job. To be sure, as the pressures from without are relieved, additional support for American institutions of learning and religion will be available. But active steps must be taken to facilitate and insure this support. And one of the most serious obstacles in the path of this objective is the denominationalism, which has not only persisted but has become intensified during the past generation. In an age when consolidation of forces has been the order of the day, when Federations and Welfare Funds have grown up all over the land, when overseas relief organizations of widely disparate interests and views have merged their forces for more effective operation, the religious and educational institutions have continued to compete with one another to their hurt.

This tendency has been most vividly dramatized by the institutions of higher learning, the seminaries for the training of rabbis and teachers. Several years ago, the Jewish Theological Seminary began its expansion program. The broad outlines of this expansion were laid down in the blueprint for a University of Judaism. The general idea was that a school for rabbis is not enough. Jewish life demands trained leaders in social service, the arts, education, administration and all the other phases of Jewish interest. The idea was quickly taken up by the Yeshivah College and the Hebrew Union College. The Yeshivah University opened up new departments, and the Hebrew Union College likewise. Dropsie College, which until then had confined its work to post-graduate studies in Semitic languages and cognate subjects, also broadened its scope to include a teachers training school and an Institute for Israel, Palestine and the Middle East.

All these wholesome and commendable developments were marred, however, by the inevitable clash that resulted. For each institution, feeling that *it* was serving the entire community, and not merely its denominational group, turned to the community at large for support. Competing with one another has led the campaigners and the fund raisers to point up the differences between one institution and another. Where such differences were slight, even negligible, it was necessary to magnify them.

No one wishes to deny that significant differences do exist between one institution and another, based upon convictions which are sincerely held. But no one can say that the difference between one school of higher learning and another is greater than the difference that existed between the JDC and UPA in their most controversial days. No one can say that the difference between the schools is greater than the differences that exist among the scores of institutions constituting the American Fund for Palestinian Institutions, which range from Hechalutz to the yeshivahs in Jerusalem. The fact is that joint campaigns for funds do not necessarily destroy the integrity and individuality of the participating bodies.

On the one hand, the value of cooperative fund-raising is enormous. If all institutions of higher Jewish learning in America would combine forces to educate American Jews to the vital need for religion and culture in this land, they could produce an unprecedented impact upon the thinking of a whole generation.

Now is the time for some hard thinking about this crucial problem.

JUDAH LEON MAGNES

WE mourn the death of Judah Leon Magnes. His death has taken from us a soul whose virtues one rarely encounters in our times. In the midst of a world that has come in so great part to despair of human values and to look down somewhat superciliously on a simple-hearted faith in their potency, he remained a courageous ex-

emplar of the ethical idealism that has informed Jewish tradition at its best. He did not render mere lip service to ideals but sought to give them concrete embodiment in the life of his people and, above all, in his own life. He was not afraid of multiple loyalties. A citizen of the world in the universality of his religious outlook, he nevertheless merged his life with the life-stream of world Jewry. Casting in his lot with the Jewry of Eretz Yisrael, he still maintained his connection with American Jewry and his faith in its spiritual potentialities.

To consecrate himself to the service of his people, Judah L. Magnes chose the rabbinate. To save the world from what was to him the greatest of all evils, he dedicated himself to the cause of peace. To sustain in the Jews of Eastern Europe the will to survive the pogroms of the early part of the century, he rallied American Jewry behind their self-defense movement.

To give status to American Jewry and to assure the creative survival of Judaism, he helped to establish the New York Kehillah, the Jewish Community, which he served as chairman from 1901 to 1922. Though that first effort at organizing New York Jewry failed, the Kehillah idea survived and, we firmly believe, is destined ultimately to be realized. It was his hope that the American Jewish Committee, of which he was one of the founders, would initiate a movement for the organization of local Jewish communities throughout the country and serve as its backbone.

Dr. Magnes believed in the peoplehood of Israel. He was convinced that the core of the Jewish problem was the homelessness of the Jewish people and that Judaism would not survive without a center from which could radiate the spiritual values of our civilization. Thus he was led to participate actively in the Zionist movement at a time when such participation was a detriment to success in a rabbinical career, particularly in Reform circles. When World War I engulfed the world, his love for his people and his determination to find means for their relief and rehabilitation impelled him to help organize the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

After the war, when most people believed that education would be the hope of the future, it was inevitable that Judah Magnes would devote his energy to the furtherance of education. Together with the late Dr. Samson Benderley and Prof. Israel Friedlander, he was influential in the establishment of the first bureau of Jewish education in America. He heeded the call of the people of Eretz Yisrael and became first chancellor and then president of the new Hebrew University in Jerusalem. While in the land, he saw the condition of the underprivileged, he felt the plight of the downtrodden, he understood the needs of the children. It was natural, therefore, that he was impelled to accept Hadassah's invitation to head its Council in Palestine. Each of his many channels of service indicates an essential element in his character—a passionate devotion to justice, great intellectual integrity, love for humanity, a prophetic zeal in creating better human relations.

Dr. Magnes's vision, his knowledge and understanding of Jewish life and the Jewish people, made him kin to the prophets of Israel. He shared with them, also, an uncompromising attitude toward that which seemed to him evil and unrighteous. Like the prophets, he did not hesitate to castigate his own people and the peoples of the world for defections from moral and ethical behavior. He was intransigent in his adherence to what he believed to be the right course of action. It was this inflexibility that often brought him into difficulty with those charged

with the responsibility for carrying out practical programs. His inability to compromise with his own position separated him, very often, from those he tried to serve. And, as did the prophets of old, he suffered because of the gulf resulting between him and the people.

Now that he has passed to the "world of truth," we are confident that the gulf between him and his opponents will not persist, that, as our people have cherished the memory of the prophets who castigated them most severely, so they will cherish the memory of Judah Leon Magnes. For they know that he loved them and that they are a better people for his having lived among them.

A PRAYER WITH DANGEROUS IMPLICATIONS

FOR the occasion of the New Year, the first year of the statehood of Israel, Chief Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog composed a prayer which was sent to Orthodox congregations, not only in Israel and Jerusalem but all over the world, and was widely published in the Jewish press. The prayer entreated God's protection of the State of Israel and invoked His providential care for the Jewish people everywhere, concluding with the words of the traditional liturgy: "Shine forth in the majesty of Thy triumphant strength over all the inhabitants of the world, that all that has breath in its nostrils may say: The Lord God of Israel is King and His domination rules over all." Nobody can question the propriety of voicing such sentiments as these. But one sentence in Rabbi Herzog's prayer, although it expresses a traditional hope, should not have been uttered on this occasion. We refer to the words: "Be mindful of the entire household of Israel in all the lands of their dispersion and cause them soon to march erect into Zion Thy city and Jerusalem the abode of Thy Name, as it is written in the Torah of Moses Thy servant: 'If any of you that are dispersed be in the uttermost regions under heaven, from thence will the Lord your God gather you, and from thence will he take you and bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it.' "

The hope voiced in this prayer is one that Orthodox Jewry has cherished throughout the ages as part of the messianic dream. If Rabbi Herzog had merely reiterated that hope in its messianic context, as something to be achieved "in the end of days," we would not question the propriety of expressing it. But when he associates the expectation of a universal return from the *galut* with the establishment of the Jewish state in our day, he puts it into a *contemporary political context* that radically changes its implications. If, as would appear, Rabbi Herzog wishes us to believe that the establishment of the state is actually the beginning of the Messianic Era, in which the Temple is to be rebuilt and the Davidic dynasty restored, he is treading on very dangerous ground indeed. For such an attitude would justify the fears of the Moslems with regard to their holy places in the Temple area.

And certainly his words carry the obvious implication that the establishment of the State of Israel is the divine signal for the gathering in now of *all* the dispersed of Israel and that whoever does not respond to the divine call to migrate to Eretz Yisrael is a sinner, a rebel against the will of God as inscribed in the Torah. In other words, Chief Rabbi Herzog has given the religious sanction to the mischievous policy of *shelilat hagolah*, of denying the right of Jews to continue in the diaspora and the legitimacy of perpetuating Jewish life, religious as well as

secular, in America and other countries of the dispersion.

We call that a mischievous policy because it violates the principle of our Sages, "One must not impose a decree upon the community which the community cannot carry out." That principle is more than a counsel of expediency. To proclaim a duty that men cannot fulfil can have but one effect—to give them a guilt complex which leaves them not only unhappy but morally confused.

Not all Jews can migrate to Eretz Yisrael, even if they should want to. The land can certainly not at present support a population of twelve million. To imply that Jews violate a divine command when they do not pull out their stakes and take up residence anew in Eretz Yisrael is, in view of the impossibility of such a general exodus, to discourage their interest in Jewish religion generally. For, if Eretz Yisrael is the only place in which a Jew can live a good Jewish life and find self-fulfilment in the religious civilization of his people, what hope is there for the Jews who are left behind?

What are they to do? Are they to look to other faiths for the satisfaction of their religious needs? Are they to abandon the hope of maintaining a satisfying religious life and be content with a drab secularism based on the inability of the Christian world to assimilate them?

We do not for one moment imagine that Chief Rabbi Herzog intended such inferences to be drawn from his words. We assume that, in excess of enthusiasm for the religious potentialities of a free and independent Yishuv, he momentarily lost sight of the problem of Jewish life in the diaspora. But a religious leader should not let his nationalistic enthusiasm blind him to such problems. He should understand that diaspora Jews need encouragement in combating the forces making for their absorption in the dominant culture, and he should endeavor to inspire them with faith in the possibility of living a godly life wherever they may be. As it is, his prayer falls into the category of *tefillat shav,* a prayer which, in the nature of the case, cannot be fulfilled and which it is an impiety to utter.

"OLIVER TWIST" AND CENSORSHIP

THE New York Board of Rabbis has protested to the movie industry in America against the contemplated production in this country of the English film based on Dickens' "Oliver Twist." The ground for the protest was that the character of Fagin, as presented on the screen, was likely to arouse anti-Jewish feeling and was therefore dangerous.

The action of the rabbis in objecting to the showing of the film has come under criticism from sources that cannot be considered unfriendly. Thus John Crosby, in his column, "Radio in Review," in the New York *Herald Tribune,* quotes with approval the opinion of Elmer Rice, a member of the board of directors of the Civil Liberties Union. Mr. Rice, in a letter addressed to the New York Board of Rabbis, wrote: "There is a clearly discernible line between protest, exposure and agitation on the one hand and suppression on the other. Suppression is an arbitrary act that denies to the public its right to make up its own mind. . . . Censorship in any form has always been an entering wedge for totalitarianism." Backing the judgment of Elmer Rice, John Crosby deplores the fact that "liberal groups—some of them, at any rate—seem to be just as anxious to suppress the ideas of others as they are to spread their own ideas."

Mr. Crosby and Mr. Rice are very much concerned about the preservation of

freedom of speech and of all civil rights. We share in that concern, but we believe that their strictures against the action of the New York Board of Rabbis misrepresent the attitudes of the Board and, what is more important, overlook essential aspects of the problem of human relations in a democracy.

It should be noted that the Board did not ask for any legal restraint on the exhibition of the "Oliver Twist" film. What it did was to write to Eric Johnston, whom the film industry itself employs to insure that none of its pictures shall be offensive to the film-going public. They stated in their letter their reasons for thinking the production of "Oliver Twist" objectionable. Nowhere was the power of the state invoked to suppress the exhibition of the film. Thus the action of the Board seems to us to fall more clearly under the category of *protest,* which even Elmer Rice admits is legitimate, than under that of *suppression,* which he regards as an infringement of civil liberty and which he accuses the Board of practicing.

We are as strongly opposed as is the Civil Liberties Union to any legal censorship which would have the authority to suppress a work of art. However objectionable from the point of view of public morals such a work might be, the danger of vesting in any man or body of men the power to determine for mature people what cultural works they should be permitted to read, see or hear is so great that freedom-loving people must accept the risk of tolerating some vicious influences in the arts as the lesser evil. The only situation justifying a curtailment of free speech is when the words uttered and the circumstances under which they are uttered are such that lawlessness and violence are almost certain to ensue as an immediate consequence. That is a limitation that our courts recognize, and no additional legal restrictions should be imposed.

But all freedom involves responsibility, and freedom of speech is no exception. This, too, the law recognizes, as it offers redress to individuals who have been libeled or slandered. But against the defamation of religious, racial or national groups, there is no such legal redress, although the mischief done by such mass libels may be far in excess of any that could result from a similar offense against individuals. How can groups protect themselves against defamation, direct or by innuendo, if they are to be denied even the right to protest?

We suppose that Mr. Rice would say that the Board of Rabbis would have had a right to criticize the production of "Oliver Twist" but has no right to urge its withdrawal by the movie industry. That would merely be giving maligned minorities the right to lock the stable door after the horse is stolen. Clearly, in a community that recognizes freedom of speech and freedom of the arts, the responsibility for the ethical use of such freedom rests primarily on the authors, artists, publishers and producers. And equally clearly, any group of people who feel that they are likely to be hurt by the presentation of any such work of art have a right as free men to tell the producers how they feel and what effect the production of the contemplated work is likely to have on the public. From that point of view, it was not only the right but the duty of the New York Board of Rabbis to call to the attention of the movie industry the danger of showing "Oliver Twist" on the screen.

To argue that the picture should be shown because it is a work of art is not legitimate. "The Merchant of Venice" is also a work of art, but its showing in Central Europe during the time of the Nazi bid for power resulted in

riots that brought injury and death to Jews. Would those who criticize the New York Board of Rabbis condone riot, arson and murder, if they happen to be instigated in artistic language? Is not the protection of innocent people from defamation and oppression more important than the privilege of the artist to postitute his art to the service of fanatical hatred? Great is the power of art, and no less great is the responsibility of the artist not to abuse that power.

Nor is it legitimate to argue that "Oliver Twist" has long been a classic in the English language and that it has never had any marked influence in arousing hatred of the Jew, that Dickens himself was not a Jew-hater as was made evident by his portrayal of a noble Jew in "Our Mutual Friend" to make amends for his characterization of Fagin. The fact that he felt it necessary to make amends is creditable to Charles Dickens, but it also shows that even his own considered judgment told him that, in portraying Fagin as he did, he had sinned unintentionally, if not deliberately. To apologize for him, as John Crosby does, by saying that "if Charles Dickens was anti-Semitic in his characterization of Fagin, then he was anti-English in his portrayal of Pecksniff and just about as anti-American as it is possible to get in much of Martin Chuzzlewit," does not make sense. The truth is that he was anti-American, but since Americans were not a minority whose security depended on the goodwill of a British majority, his critique of Americans, whether true or false, could not do much mischief. And, as for Pecksniff, the fact that he was a villain is in no way associated with his being an Englishman. Fagin, too, was a British subject, but he is always tagged not as an Englishman but as a Jew, and his villainy is assumed to stem from his Judaism.

One more fact must be taken into consideration in judging between the New York Board of Rabbis and its critics on this issue, and that is the difference between a movie and a book. The presentation of an unsavory Jewish character in a book is much less mischievous than on the screen. Books are read only by people with sufficient intelligence to read. The people that engage in pogroms are largely recruited from among morons who are incapable of the intellectual effort of reading a book, but they do attend the movies. Moreover, reading reaches the emotions via the intelligence, which subjects them to its control, but in the movies the appeal of skillful actors to the emotions of the audience through their senses invites their participation in the resentment which the villain evokes. Finally, readers of novels read in isolation and do not communicate their reactions to one another, but the audience at a movie can easily be stirred to mass-hysteria, particularly where the movie confirms an already existing prejudice by portraying a popular stereotype in an exciting situation.

For all of these reasons we congratulate the New York Board of Rabbis for the steps it has taken to persuade the movie industry not to exhibit this dangerous film. Beside rendering a service to the Jewish people and the cause of good human relations in America, they have rendered a service to the movie industry by dissuading it from producing a picture which would have been offensive to a large section of its patronage. And they have done so without violating the civil rights of anybody.

REALITIES AND VALUES

TYPICAL OF THE CHANGES IN the life of the Yishuv since it has become indepedent of Great Britain is the following item taken from the illustrated Israeli magazine, *Histadrut Foto News,* for October, 1948:

"The new semester in Jerusalem finds a greatly increased enrollment, due to the abolition of tuition fees. Now, all children of school age are able and required to attend classes regardless of the financial situation of their families. For the first time universal education is a fact in this city."

▼

THE IRAQUI GOVERNMENT HAS a novel way of financing its participation in the war on Israel. It takes wealthy Jews, accuses them of treason, executes or imprisons them and confiscates their property. Twenty million dinar or the equivalent of $80,000,000 are to be raised in this way, according to estimates of sums involved in past and pending trials. The source for these figures is the special Baghdad correspondent of *El Ahram,* the foremost Arabic paper published in Cairo.

A JTA dispatch of October 29, which conveys this information, tells us that one of the Jews recently arrested is Sasson Kadouri, Chief Rabbi of Baghdad. He is charged with arousing the Jews against the government in the course of a sermon in the synagogue, although he always was particularly careful to dissociate himself from the Zionists and frequently denounced Zionism at the government's request.

And the representatives of the Western democracies in the UN exchange polite amenities with the delegates from this gangster government and take council with one another on applying sanctions against the Jewish defenders of Israel, the only decent regime in the entire Middle East.

▼

THE ALLIANCE ISRAELITE UNIverselle has received less support from American Jewry than it merits, partly because its headquarters are in Paris rather than in any American city, partly because in the past it has frequently taken an anti-Zionist stand, and partly, we imagine, because it has represented French interests in Moslem countries, while our national policy has leaned toward British interests.

But this should not blind us to the important services the Alliance has rendered in raising the cultural and economic level of Oriental Jewry through its network of vocational schools, one of the most notable of which is the Mikveh Israel agricultural school in Eretz Yisrael.

Beside these educational activities, it has participated with the Anglo-Jewish Association in advising the UN on questions related to the proposed Bill of Rights and other matters affecting Jewish interests in the drafting of the post-war treaties.

With the break-up of European Jewish communities, the raising of the economic and cultural status of Oriental Jewish communities assumes a growing importance, and the work of the Alliance in their behalf is entitled to increased recognition and support.

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The National Jewish Post, IN its issue of October 29, calls attention to an unprecedented action by Congregation Beth El of Camden, N. J., which has created considerable interest—and some controversy.

In sharp contrast with the unsavory commercial exploitation of the High Holidays by the rental of seats, that congregation, under the leadership of Rabbi Harry B. Kellman, made provision for a

special service for the unaffiliated conducted in the synagogue's auditorium by Rabbi David Yardoni of New York. An invitation was extended through the press to all unaffiliated persons who wished to attend and no charge was made for this service.

Criticsm of the congregation's policy was voiced on the score that it encourages Jews who should contribute to the maintenance of the synagogue to neglect this obligation and yet to claim the services of the synagogue on the rare occasions when they feel the need for them. It is feared, indeed, that the effect of this policy would be to discourage membership in the congregation.

We nevertheless welcome the experiment. It is high time that we look about us for other means of supporting our religious institutions than the undignified and degrading one of renting seats for the Holy Day services, as if for some theatrical performance.

Perhaps some compromise plan might be adopted whereby no seats are sold, but the worshipers are asked to make an annual voluntary contribution to the congregation in accordance with their means.

At any rate, some alternative should be sought for the common practice of selling seats. We would appreciate suggestions from our readers.

▼

Mrs. Clare Booth Luce opposes permitting atheists the use of time on the radio. "The Federal Communications Commission," she said, as reported by *Religious News Service*, "interprets freedom of speech to mean that men have a right to attack a person's religion. If you do this, you deny freedom of religion."

We beg to differ. We have enough faith in religion to believe that it stands only to benefit by being exposed to criticism. It would take more than the propaganda of atheists to prevent our engaging in worship.

In this connection a Hasidic story is significant. A certain *tzadik* was once asked how it is that God tolerates atheists, seeing that He is all-powerful. This is his reply:

"It sometimes happens that a poor man comes to me in need of help. I may then be disposed to say, 'We have a good God in heaven and He will provide, for He loves all His creatures.' But that would be wrong. There are times when we should feel that we alone are responsible, as if there were no God but ourselves."

In other words, the *tzadik* saw a function for the atheist in the divine economy. The challenge of atheism is to prevent the religionist from becoming smug and self-righteous. If men cannot see God in the world, it is because evils exist which obscure the reality of God and which it is the function of religion to remove. The atheist thus contributes to religious proggress by pointing out the inadequacies of contemporary religion and impelling us to accept a greater share of responsibility in the service of God.

▼

Some time ago we published a series of articles by Rabbi Israel Gerber suggesting that the modern rabbi can learn much from psychiatry in the discharge of his pastoral duties, particularly in connection with the *mitzvot* of *bikkur holim* and *nihum avelim* (ministering to the sick and comforting the mourners). The articles stressed the role of religion in affording relief to the mental anguish of the ill and the bereaved.

In view of the interest aroused by those articles, we believe that our readers will also be interested in the following item of news, reported by the *National Jewish Post* in its issue of October 22.

On the basis of a report by Rabbi

(*Continued on page* 20)

Why Bible Readings Only?

By MORTIMER J. COHEN

MANY States in the United States require by law that, at each assembly of a public elementary or high school, a number of verses of the Bible be read without interpretation, leaving to the Principal or teacher in charge of the assembly the choice of the Bible readings.

The recent decision of the United States Supreme Court concerning religious instruction in the public schools, though it reemphasized the need to maintain the wall of separation between Church and State, did not specifically declare that Bible reading is violative of this fundamental American principle. Some, therefore, believe that the prohibition of readings from the Bible is not included in the Supreme Court's decision; others, however, hold that it is. We shall have to wait for a test case to settle the issue.

Meanwhile, is there any way in which the reading of the Bible in our public schools can be justified, without violating the principle of separating Church and State? Should we not determine whether in a democracy such as ours it is proper to read the Bible in the public schools?

The Pros and Cons of Bible Reading

In answering these questions, much depends on whether we regard Bible reading as an act of devotion or as a process of instruction or study. It is one thing to participate in a devotional or religious service; it is another matter entirely to learn about a religion; the attitudes and purposes involved are totally different If the reading of religious literature is a devotional act, then one must view it as introducing religion into the public school life; but, if it be regarded as primarily an act of instruction—like the study of portions of the Bible in many of the high schools of the States at present — then surely the reading of religious literature in assemblies becomes more justifiable.

Numerous objections have been raised to Bible reading in the public schools. These require no detailed discussion here. Certain passages from the New Testament give offense to Jewish children. Protestants and Catholics respectively have raised their objections to Bible reading, mostly from the point of view of interpretation and translation. But these objections are overcome by prohibiting interpretation and by a wiser selection of passages to be read. The atheist's point of view is that these readings are objectionable because they encourage belief in incredible myths and develop superstitious attitudes. What attitude should we Jews take as religious people who believe in the Bible and as Americans who hold that our schools are the bulwarks of democracy, where religion must not be permitted to divide citizen from citizen?

Jews can, of course, say that Bible reading must be eliminated completely from the public schools. It was and remains a dangerous wedge for the intrusion into the public school system of the zealous forces of sectarianism. Many Christians, too, take this attitude, fearing, if they are Catholics, that Protestantism might come to dominate the religious thinking of the children, or, if they are Protestants, that Catholicism might. Jews, naturally, are particularly aware of this danger because their position as a small religious minority makes them so vulnerable.

It may be that this absolute and extreme position on Bible readings is the

only logical one that flows from the principle of the separation of Church and State. Like cancer, with which one cannot be squeamish or compromising, every particle, every possible trace of the offending element must be removed. The slightest minute cell that remains becomes a potential center of danger and even of death.

The moment, however, we put the case against Bible readings in such vehement and extreme terms, we sense that something is wrong with our argument, certainly with our analogy. It shocks us to hear of Bible reading being regarded as a source of danger to our democracy, a menace to its very life. We have always regarded religious literature as character-building material, as a healthy molder of personality, and as an ethical force making for spiritual wholesomeness in persons. Under no circumstances can we regard Bible readings in the same destructive category as the dread disease of cancer.

Furthermore, all of us, both Jews and Christians, are fully cognizant of the rootage of our American heritage in the Judeo-Christian tradition as found in the Bible. Americanism, despite its Tom Paines, Thomas Jeffersons and Benjamin Franklins (who at worst were not atheists but deists), was not and is not an atheistic and materialistic way of life. American concepts and teachings are deeply saturated with the idealism of the Bible. American leaders take pride in their Biblical heritage. American civilization, with its great liberal tradition of justice under the law, the rights of the common man, liberty, equality, and the right of men to happiness in life, is colored by Biblical teachings.

Therefore, while the average American harbors a sharp suspicion and hostility towards teaching religion in the public schools, he does not have that same intensely hostile feeling towards the reading of the Bible. He does not show a fighting antagonism against religious literature, which he regards as part of the noble spiritual heritage of mankind. The churches, in his opinion, may have ulterior motives to serve in propagating their sectarian doctrines, but the Bible is not a sectarian document. It is a treassure for all men to know and possess. Indeed, even atheists like Robert Ingersol could not but admire greatly large portions of it.

Preserving the Benefits and Avoiding the Harm of Bible Reading

Is there then a democratic use of Bible readings that would not offend even the most liberal American Christian, or nonconformist? Can we Jews justify a more positive and constructive attitude towards Bible readings, and not remain among "the great negators"?

We might ask ourselves, first of all, wherein lies the great danger of teaching religion in the public schools, and consequently, of reading religious literature? Is it not primarily the fear lest any *one* religion might become *the* dominant religion? And having become the dominant religion, that it ally itself with the State and, in time, deny other religions the right to be practised, and that the State, on its part, might use the dominant religion for its own purposes? In a word, as has happened before in history and as is happening in parts of our present-day world, the "Intolerant State" might come into being and persecute the other religions, their institutions and followers. This is the insidious danger that is feared and that must be overcome.

Aware of this potential danger, must democracy deny and reject religious literature, the spiritual reservoir of humanity, the sanctioner of all that is precious in democracy itself? Should not a true democracy actively bring to its children the

knowledge and awareness that men have sought God in *many* ways, and that there are *many* religions in which different peoples have worshiped God? Just as democracy in the liberal state accepts and teaches pluralism of cultures, should it not recognize and accept a pluralism of religions? Of course, where a religion holds that it, and it alone, possesses the whole truth, that without it men cannot find salvation, and that all other religions are frauds and deceits, we cannot have democracy but only imperialism in that religion.

Herein Judaism is truly unique. Indeed, herein Judaism has a special contribution to make to the American democracy. Judaism—despite other tendencies that have appeared from time to time —has been of such a universal nature that, holding firmly to its own religious insights and truths, it possessed enough of the democratic spirit to declare: "The righteous of all the peoples of the world have a share in the world to come." Many other texts could be marshaled to witness to the remarkable sense of religious democracy found in Judaism.

We Jews can make a positive contribution to American thought by insisting that American children should be made aware, in their public school careers, of the varieties of religious experience of their fellow-citizens. Indeed, if "freedom of worship" has any realistic content it must lie just here, namely, that Americanism looks upon the varied religious experiences of all Americans as equally valid for them and regards freedom from interference in the observance of one's religion as among the precious rights of American citizenship.

Indeed, even if out of the American national experience an American religion were, in time, to develop and were to become so self-conscious as to grow into an American Church with all the *sancta* of traditional religion — holidays, ceremonies and customs, laws and literature, holy places and heroes—there would still be need to cultivate in Americans the awareness of the religious experiences of other peoples and nations besides their own. Only so can we prevent American religion from becoming spiritually aristocratic, imperialistic and world-conquering.

All this leads up to this simple, fundamental proposition: As Jews and Americans who count religion among the great spiritual and cultural forces in human experience and in the molding of life and character, who see in it a genuine expression of the human spirit at its best and highest and sanction for the democratic ideals of Americanism, we should urge that in our public elementary and high schools, at their assemblies, readings from *the religious literatures of the major religions of mankind should be introduced.*

Note especially the words "of the major religions of mankind." While it is true that Americans generally meet only Christians and Jews and therefore seek to know the religious heritage of these groups, they ought also to become familiar with the fact that there are other great, universal religions in the world Approximately 27.8 percent of mankind are Christians; approximately 72.2 percent are non-Christians; and among the latter are counted the Jews who make up approximately 0.7 percent of the world's population.*

The Value of Reading from All the Sacred Scriptures of Mankind

Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and other religions have won the loyalty of hundreds of mil-

* The World Book Encyclopedia, Volume 14, p. 651, Edition of 1940. The Quarrie Corporation, Chicago.

lions of men and women in the world. These religions have created great religious literatures. In these literatures their followers have found instruction, enlightenment and inspiration for the good life as individuals, members of society and citizens of the world. In their pages they meet God face to face and partake of His spirit. Their holy men and saints, their religious hungers, doubts, yearnings, aspirations and dreams have left a record in these literatures, often in exalted and noble language.

By being made aware of this religious literature, American children will be awakened to the realization that many nationalities, races and civilizations go to make up American life and the life of the world,—and that each of them is entitled to respect as of genuine worth for the people who embrace it and live by it. Moreover, they will thus be taught to appreciate the rich and manifold varieties of religious experience through which men come to know the great Reality within and behind the universe and man—God.

Thus will be developed the truly democratic American, who will, at the same time, be the democratic World Citizen. He will come to know about the wealth of mankind's religions. He will become better acquainted with their literatures, their ethical and spiritual teachings, the inspiration of the lives of their founders, sages and saints, their prophets, dreamers and poets. They will soon recognize that the foundations of the universal religions are basically the same; that they all spring out of the same human needs; that they seek to satisfy the same human hungers for worth, value and significance of the individual in the world, and for meaning of the human enterprise as a whole in the vast cosmic scheme. Historical and social forces may have shaped the universal spirit into different forms and modes, but, to be truly human, wise and understanding—potential citizens of One World—men must recognize in their own religion the incarnation of the Universal Spirit, the Father of all Humanity. Only so will religion become a force to unite men to each other in the bonds of brotherhood, and only so will it bind all men back to the cosmic source of their common origin in God.

All this, it is believed, can be achieved in measurable part, through a program of readings in the literatures of the world's religions. In each community, or on a national scale, a group of religious teachers might select a large number of appropriate readings from these literatures which would be published and used in our public schools. Each reading need not be longer than what is required at present. Without interpretation, each reading might be introduced by some agreed-upon formula that would indicate that it is taken from the religious literature of a named people and that this people are followers of that religion. Furthermore, these selections should be made in terms of ethical value, religious insight and beauty of literary expression. Especially should such selections be made as express the ideals that men hold in common. All the universal religions, as has been pointed out above, aim at the same large objectives: A spiritual interpretation of life; the worth of ethical values in human relationships; the pursuit of truth, justice, love and peace as man's highest duty; and the realization ultimately of a good world for all humanity.

In the course of 8 to 10 years' continuous exposure to the great religious literatures of mankind, American children, as they pass through the elementary and high schools, will learn: that there are many religions in the world; that different people live, by their own religion, good and worthwhile lives; that there

are many ways of approaching God's presence; that each people has a right to seek Him in its own way; and, above all, that if we are to build a united, peaceful world, we must cultivate an acceptance of each other's right to be different religiously, especially since all religions aim at the same values that make for the unification, enrichment and wisdom of mankind.

A procedure with these objectives should, we believe, not only commend itself to religious people of all denominations who are not fanatics and bigots; it should also satisfy ethical culturists and even avowed atheists. For even atheists must, if they are reasonable, recognize that religion is, for good or for evil, a part of the world's culture. They would not eliminate the classic literature of paganism from the school curriculum though it contains myths in which they do not believe. They need not then, for the sake of consistency, oppose their children's learning the symbolically significant myths of all religions, so long as no pressure is brought to bear on the child to accept them as true. As for the ethical teachings of the prophets and sages of all religion, these can certainly not be open to objection. If agnostics and atheists in the community express a fear that their children will be taught religious dogmas which they consider superstition, I see no objection to including on the committee that selects the scriptural passages to be used, a number of atheists, so long as they accept the principle that children should be taught to recognize and to respect whatever ethical values are implicit in the various religious traditions.

Certainly we Jews can regard with favor the reading of religious literature in the place of the reading of the Bible alone. This program would preserve the democratic process, overcome the fear of violating the principle of separation of Church and State, and, far from exerting a divisive and subversive influence, would introduce a constructive and unifying force.

TRANSLATION AS SELF-EXPRESSION

"All art, as Aristotle taught us, is mimic; and so is translation. But mimicry soon lands in despair. Nature cannot be fully copied, a poem cannot be fully translated. There sets in a struggle with the resisting medium: the marble, the pigment, the alien word; and this wrestling, with varying degrees of triumph, is the personal signature, the seal of the artist.

"Translation, therefore, does not aim at self-effacement. It is not a thin and unpolished glass. Such transparency, even if desirable, is unobtainable. The aim is rather self-expression with the poem as an inspiration, just as the poem is self-expression with life as an inspiration."

ISRAEL EFROS, in the Foreword to *Complete Poetical Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik,* published by the Histadruth Ivrith of America.

TOWN MEETING TONIGHT

New Orleans, Louisiana November, 1948

Peace and Freedom

By FRIEDA CLARK HYMAN

First speaker bleats from stage:
"Peace is our constant plea."
Second speaker bobs from stage:
"I agree."
Third speaker bawls from stage:
"Freedom is our precious fee."
Fourth speaker bows from stage:
"I agree."

Fifth speaker is mute above
In his ghetto balcony.
Yet his speech, like a drum, dooms
Humanity,
Booms strong and low and clear,
Insistently:

"Peace is white,
But its base is black.
Black sweat unites
With tears that are black
With icy breath
Of fear that is black
In a trinity of pitch.

"Freedom is white,
Placid perfumed
Like a lily smooth
Upon a tomb.
Marble hides
Rope and flame
Memories

Incised by shame
And a white-snaked whip."

From the hall below the questions whine
From the mouths of men both deaf and blind:
"Can we keep our peace and our freedom too,
Keep them safe, we elected few?"
And the four-tongued chorus, deftly-blest,
Asserts blah, blah and a mighty YES.

But the drum demands in the upper kraal:
"Shall peace stand tall
When sweat and tear
And black-smoked fear
Destroy their alchemy?

"Shall freedom flower
And the tomb devour
The lily white?
Shall freedom flower
And memory claim
A history-light
Illume its shame?

"Shall both endure
If upon this hall
This kraal should fall—
If the labelled chairs
On the nether floor
Be crumbled biers?"

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!
None shall stand.
BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!
None shall flower.
BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!
None shall endure
On the black-crowned Judgment Day.
Speak Lord!
Just Lord!
IS TODAY NOT JUDGMENT DAY?

Essays of A Hebrew Columnist

By BERNARD ISAACS

IVRI Anokhi (I Am a Hebrew)* is the 5th Hebrew volume authored by Daniel Persky and, in a typical Perskian fashion, the fly-leaf carries the legend that "permission is granted to reproduce or translate any portion of this book in any form whatever."

In the prefatory chapter, the author converses very intimately with the generations that are to come after him. He wants them to be cognizant of the fact that, together with the loyal pioneers who built Palestine, there was another type of pioneer that belongs to the same category of faithful sons of Israel, and that is the Hebraist, whose material for building the home of his people consisted of the 22 sacred letters of the Hebrew alphabet. He, too, therefore, ought to be numbered among the builders of Israel.

Another chapter, which is peculiariy Perskian, is one in which Persky interviews himself, as it were. He asks himself a number of searching questions, and he gives himself direct and unequivocal replies. One of the questions is, "Why did you choose the light article form of writing?" To which he answers: "I did not choose it—this is my nature, to be anarchistic, that is, free, unfettered, uninhibited, and it is the light article form which gives this freedom. Here you can just prattle away if you wish, and you can also talk sense if you have any."

There is one question I would have liked to ask Persky myself, and that is, what he does with those papers, periodicals, magazines and bulletins which he gathers up each Friday afternoon in the Editorial rooms of *Hadoar,* packs in a sack, (not a brief case or a hand bag, but a good old-fashioned sack) and carries to his room. I saw him do that some time ago when I visited *Hadoar* in New York. I saw him pack up all this discarded material and carry it home for his week-end pleasure. I wonder what he does with it?

Now, as to the book itself,—it is classified under three headings, *Sefatenu* (Our Language), *Sifrutenu* (Our Literature), *Tarbutenu* (Our Culture). Although a good deal of it is written in a light and even frivolous vein, it contains a good many literary and philological essays.

In the section entitled *Sefatenu* (Our Language), he devotes one chapter to transliteration, a problem which has been giving the Hebrew writer a good deal of concern. He touches upon the question of the permanent and the temporary in language. He also discusses the phenomenon of words which are alike, in sound, but differ in their meaning, that is, homonymous words. The question of how to digest the Aramaic words, that is, how to Hebraize them, is likewise given some attention in one of his essays.

The much discussed matter of the *havarah* (standard of pronunciaton) that should be introduced in American-Hebrew Schools is taken up in one of his chapters.. It is Persky's opinion that the American Hebrew Schools should adhere to the *Havarah Ashkenazit* and should not adopt the Sephardic or Palestinian pronunciation. "Don't sever the connections between the father and the child, and don't introduce a pronunciation which belongs to one geographic area to an area which is entirely different."

A very prominent place is given in this

* *Ivri Anokhi,* by Daniel Persky, published by the author, New York, 1948, 318 pp.

section to the rules for punctuation, and for this many Hebrew instructors will be very thankful. Although punctuation marks fellow universal laws, there are many exceptions which apply only to a particular language. Persky deals with this in a very detailed and elaborate manner.

In the same section, he analyzes the styles of several of the Hebrew classic writers such as Mendele, Ahad Ha'am, Sokolow and others. In discussing Sokolow's style of writing, he relates an interesting anecdote. On visiting America, Sokolow told Persky about his complete dictionary of the Hebrew language to which he had already devoted several years and to which he referred as his "life work." Of this work he stated that it would "contain all Hebrew words and expressions culled from (his) own writings." Persky asked him what would happen if perchance there would be found some "poor little word" which hadn't found place in one of his writings. To this Sokolow replied, without a moment's hesitation: "There is no Hebrew word of which I haven't made some use somewhere in my writing."

The second section, known as *Sifrutenu* (Our Literature), also contains a wealth of information. He does not limit himself to one type of literature. He deals with the secular as well as the rabbinic and liturgical literature; with the periodical as well as with the more permanent form—the book. He deals with Hebrew Literature in Palestine, in the United States and in European countries.

The last section, entitled *Tarbutenu* (Our Culture), is opened by telling the story of the prophet Jonah, who, when asked five different questions — "Who is the cause of this evil? What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country and of what people are you?" — answers, *"Ivri Anokhi"* (I am a Hebrew). Everything is included in this laconic answer. We, too, Persky concludes, have only one answer to all the harassing questions — *Ivri Anokhi.* This section, too, is rich in material which is far from being column-like. It deals with our culture in its many and varied manifestations.

Much prominence also is given in this section to the development of Jewish Education in America.

This book is replete with excellent material. It is true that, quite often, Persky, being true to Persky, gets involved in a newly coined Hebrew word or expression. He then forgets the "world and all" and weaves a thought around that particular word. This deviation would be considered a fault with any other author, but with Persky, the "anarchist," this is just one of his interesting eccentricities.

REALITIES AND VALUES

(*Continued from Page* 11)

Roland B. Gittelsohn on conditions at Winter General Hospital and the Menninger Foundation at Topeka, Kansas, the Jewish Welfare Board's division of religious activities will prepare special prayers and devotional literature for mentally ill Jewish veterans in Veterans Administration hospitals. Action on the project would begin, following a similar study of parapeglics, tuberculous patients and surgical cases, which is to be made by Rabbi Israel Gerber, author of the articles referred to above.

Random Thoughts

The recent presidential election, in refuting the forecast of the expert pollsters and the professional politicians, has demonstrated the difference between democracy and totalitarianism.

At the same time it has magnified on a vast national scale, for the naked eye of the spirit to see, the difference between freedom of the will and a foregone conclusion.

* * *

It is good to hear an outstanding poll-taker say: "I could not have been more wrong."

It is even better to hear him admit: "The thing that bothers me most is that I don't know why I was wrong."

It would be best if he could realize that poll-taking is inherently mischievous, if not immoral. It interferes with the free exercise of responsibility.

* * *

To know when numbers count and when they don't count is the secret of democracy.

* * *

The babbit is satisfied with his old illusions.

The radical must have his new illusions.

The cynic thinks he can live without illusions.

* * *

Self-pity does not go with self-respect.

* * *

The modern version of "vanity of vanities" is "to hell with everything."

Either version is a salve to our cowardice.

* * *

If you have a date with destiny, don't give it a standup.

* * *

If speakers had the habit of clearing their minds as well as their throats before they began to speak, they would speak less and have more to say.

* * *

The truth, to be sure, makes us free. But we have to be free to get at the truth.

* * *

A riteless religion is like a suit of clothes without buttons.

* * *

The difference between believing in God and not believing in Him is equal to the difference between believing that the present crisis of humanity is part of man's growing pains and believing that it is a prelude to his extinction.

* * *

"War is too important," said Clemenceau, "to be left to the generals."

By the same token, religion is too important to be left to the theologians.

* * *

When a nation does not have to be inspired by memories that are fictitious, it does not have to entertain hopes that are illusory.

* * *

The trouble with people who want to learn the whole Torah while standing on one foot is that they haven't a leg to stand on.

* * *

Rabbi Akiba taught:

"God so loved man that He made him in His own image.

"God so loved Israel that He gave them the Torah."

About the same time John of the Gospels wrote:

"God so loved the world that He gave up His only son, so that every

one who believes in him may have eternal life, instead of perishing."

So far all that we Jews know of John's idea of God's love is Christendom's practice of man's hate.

* * *

Some people understand the Bible the way a certain little girl understood her parents.

They would always speak of their neighbor, who was an old man, as pinching pennies.

When she visited him she insisted on his showing her how he pinched pennies.

* * *

The Jewish philosopher Philo was the first to apply the allegorical method to the interpretation of the Bible.

According to him, Sarah, the wife of Abraham, symbolizes philosophy, and Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah, symbolizes the liberal arts, namely, grammar, geometry, music and rhetoric.

If Mother Sarah had had a "sitter" for Isaac, she probably would have symbolized the religious school.

* * *

The philosopher Kant helped the human mind to pull itself out from the swamp of scepticism into which it had been thrust by the philosopher Hume.

Kant did it by teaching the human mind to pull itself up by its own bootstraps.

* * *

"To save a nation's soil," says William Vogt in his *Road to Survival,* "start with the hill-top and not the river bottom."

The same principle applies to saving a nation's soul. Start with the men on top.

* * *

Civilization with its good and evil is as much a part of human nature as the shell is of the oyster.

M. M. K.

Correspondence

Corroborates Abraham G. Duker on DP Immigration

Sirs:

Abraham Duker's article on the new DP legislation in your October 1st issue was most welcome to me and demonstrates courage and integrity deserving support. I have felt keenly about the proposed DP laws from the time the subject was first crystallized in the Stratton Bill, sharing generally the reaction that Mr. Duker so ably presented. Those of us who had some opportunity to obtain first-hand familiarity with the situation through overseas experience bear a great responsibility, because we allowed ourselves to be overpowered by dominant, popular opinion—albeit misguided—when we knew how wrong it was. Had all of us who were overseas and who shared the same general opinion of the great dangers in the proposed legislation banded together to get our story across, we perhaps would not now be faced with both the legislation and the situation of one man almost alone attempting to change terribly mistaken public opinion, especially Jewish opinion.

With few exceptions, every immigrant with whom I have spoken, and every American who was overseas and had an opportunity to come close to the DP population, substantiated Mr. Duker's statement that at least a large number of the non-Jews among the DPs are former collaborationists who have retained their Nazi viewpoints. More than that, the endless series of individual and collective conflicts between Jews and non-Jewish DPs, the attitude and behavior of the non-Jew with respect to the Jew as demonstrated concretely today and in past months in Germany, bear witness to the *present* calibre and fascist potential of this group favored by the new legislation. When I was, for example, stationed at a Jewish DP camp near Munich, rarely a day or night passed without violent attacks by residents of nearby non-Jewish camps of Poles and Balts upon the Jewish camp residents and the Jewish camp police.

As I saw them, the non-Jewish DP group seemed to fall into the following categories: the fortune-hunters, particularly women, who had no roots and/or found life generally satisfying in Germany under American occupation, and who came to Germany originally partly because of the excitement, partly because Germany was winning the war at that time, partly because of the employment promises of the Germans. The second is the criminal group, who find within the chaos and disorganization of life in an occupied country, exactly the setting that appeals to their anti-

cial, hostile natures. A third are the chil-en born in Germany near the end of the ar or since then. And dominating all of these oups numerically are the collaborators, the operating "capos" (concentration camp trus-es), and Nazi co-workers.

We must not forget that well over 10 mil-on displaced persons were in Germany on -E day. Within a comparatively short time, tle more than a million remained, and from me to time thereafter, when various induce-ents were offered by the American military e.g., Gen. McNarney's offer of food rations, nds and transportation to those wishing re-atriation), still more returned to their orig-al lands, until at present, excluding the Jews, is estimated little over 500,000 remain of ie original 10 millions. The argument that ey fear communism is frequently raised to ttempt to develop sympathy for them. Yet ne wonders how the Czechoslovaks among em, who were DPs *before* the change in overnment in their homeland, fit into the icture—communism was not then the issue. ould it have been the wrath of their neigh-ors and townspeople that they feared, be-ause of pro-Nazi activities during the war?

I have not had the opportunity to be as lose to the national Jewish agency scene as Mr. Duker. Yet, I, too, thought they were ad when I observed the financial and other upport apparently given to pushing through ie DP legislation, particularly from those or-anizations whose work brings them into direct ontact with the overseas scene and who ap-arently should have known the import of heir efforts. Those of us who saw the immi-ration process in Europe found little to de-elop sympathy for the victims of fascism or aith in the efficiency of our government gencies in rooting out Nazis and collaborators. The suggestion, therefore, that the previous creening methods would suffice to keep out Nazis is ludicrous. And the further sugges-ion that more Jews might not be admitted nless there were prety strong regulations lefining this would be even more so. Recently, received in my office a request from a na-ional agency substantially increasing the quota of new immigrants. Our community hould accept the increased quota, of course. But, personally, I, too, am willing to bet that a year under the new DP law will result n fewer Jewish immigrants than came in un-der the old law, restrictive as that may have been. And not a DP or American who was n Europe has expressed disagreement with me when I've asked him about this.

Yes, the entire process whereby Jewish sup-port was given to a terrible, rotten, racist law s tragic. Not only do we deserve some ex-planation from the organizations involved but the serious study of the problem that Mr. Duker has called for, with a view to making an all-out effort to repeal the law on the issue: that it operates detrimentally to the vic-tims of facism and gives a grand bonus to the co-workers of fascism.

O. A. Mintzer

The Role of Legislation in Developing Jewish Law

Sirs:

May I take this means to express my hearty endorsement of Dr. Gordis' proposals in "Jew-ish Law in Conservative Judaism—Some Ob-servations." On the floor of the Rabbinical Assembly Convention a similar set of proposals was discussed, but, to my knowledge, no ac-tion was taken. I hope that the inherent logic of the Conservative movement will eventually compel action along these lines.

As to the distinctions between the methods of interpretation and legislation, I feel that it is impossible for the Conservative move-ment to evade the method of legislation, or *Takkanot,* in its attempt to deal with Jewish law. The gates of interpretation are not closed to us, to use a Maimonidean phrase, but the acceptance of one interpretation by our con-gregations, rather than another, when that other interpretation is backed by the greatest *Halakic* authorities of the past and the present, can be justified only on the principle of in-dependent communal legislation. It is some-times forgotten that *Halakah* is not a body of dead laws, subject to the live molding power of contemporary interpreters. As a matter of fact, *Halakah* contains the principles whereby the choice should be made, as between several possible interpretations.

If we take up the *Agunah* problem as an example, we see at once where the element of *Takkanah* comes in. Obviously, an individ-ual rabbi could not take it upon himself to put it into practice, no matter what its merit may be, in strict *Halakic* terms. If a body of rabbis and their congregations should adopt the plan, its authority and validity would stem from the circumstance of its acceptance, as a *Takkanah,* not alone from its cogency in the terms of Orthodox Halakic theory.

Probing more deeply into the source of the problem, we know that the most piognant cases of *Agunah* today result from the refusal of the husband to grant a *get.* Such cases should not be helped at all by the Epstein proposal. Yet, a method of dealing with the total situ-ation is available, since the marriage covenant is supposed to be subject to the anulling power of the rabbis. The early Medieval authorities, *"Rishonim,"* however, have decreed that this all-embracing rabbinic power to annul mar-riage bonds may not be used except in those

cases which were specifically mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud.

It is altogether historically accurate to offer an interpretation of rabbinic law that is contrary to that of the *"Rishonim,"* but such an interpretation would have no validity, so long as it was not a *Takkanah.* Once this implication is realized, there is no reason, theoretically speaking, why the method of legislation should not be openly embraced, though from a practical standpoint, it is not unreasonable to argue, as does Dr. Gordis, that the appearance of continuity should be disturbed as little as possible.

Jewish law became what it is today through the double process of interpretation and legislation. All kinds of interpretations were offered at the Jerusalem and Yabneh Academies, but the ones which were officially voted upon and approved became part of Jewish law. No man could be considered *Halakically* correct, who would today eat a chicken fried in butter, though R. Jose of Galilee approved of this practice within the domain of his authority. His interpretation was overruled by the *Takkanot* of subsequent gatherings. The *Shulhan Arukh,* together with the interpolations of Isserles, did not become the accepted interpretation of *Halakah* through their own inherent persuasiveness and logic. The communities of Germany and the Four Lands accepted the *Shulhan Arukh* through communal resolutions, which were, in fact, *Takkanot.*

Of course, there are limits to the legitimate employment of the method of *Takkanot.* In the first place, communities were defined in terms of geographical unities; in the second place, no community had the right to enact such *Takkanot* as are contrary to the spirit of *Halakah* as understood by the leading scholars of the age. Both requirements seem, at first glance, to rule out completely the possibility of resorting to *Takkanah* legislation. But, then, it appears to this correspondent, that the Conservative movement had already rejected the competence and authority of the contemporary Orthodox authorities to determine what is in fact consonant with the spirit of Torah. The very existence of the movement testifies to this rejection. Also, the actual breakdown of uniformity in Jewish pracice, especially the inclusion of Reform Jewry within the congregation of Israel, makes it impossible to continue to define communities in geographical terms. The rise of the Hasidic movement is a case in point. It was opposed initially largely on the ground that it broke communal discipline. But when the Hasidic societies were firmly established as separate communities within communities, their right to enact special practices for their adherents was no longer seriously challenged.

These theoretical considerations aside, this correspondent desires to urge once again t mobilization of the fullest support in beha of the author's practical proopsals, in the totality.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

YIDDEN UN ANDERE ETNISCHE GRUPE IN DIE FAREINIGTE SHTATEN (Je and Other Ethnic Groups in the Unite States), by Charles Bezalel Sherman. sociological study of similarities and dissim larities of reaction to the majority cultu on the part of Jewish and other ethn minorities in the United States. With note bibliography and index, 424 pp. Publishe by Undzer Veg, New York.

COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS OF HA YIM NAHMAN BIALIK, volume 1, edite with introduction by Israel Efros. Illustra tions by Lionel S. Reiss. The translation from the Hebrew are by a variety of poet Some of them are published for the fir time in this volume; others have been car fully selected from the best extant tran lations. When the second volume appear this work will be the first complete versio of the works of any modern Hebrew poe in English. Published by The Histadrut Ivrith of America, Inc., New York, 194 $4.00.

THE MESSIANIC THEME IN THI PAINTINGS OF THE DURA SYNA GOGUE, by Rachel Wischnitzer. A discus sion of the significance of the painte panels in the third century synagogue o Dura Europos unearthed by archaeologist in 1932. Illustrated with pictures of th panels discussed. xii + 135 pp. Publishe by the University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1948. $6.00.

UNITY IN DISPERSION, a history of th World Jewish Congress. An official com pilation of the activities of that congrega tion from its origin to the present day. Wit a preface by A. Leon Kubowitzki, 381 pp Published by the World Jewish Congress New York, 1948. $2.00 cloth bound, $1.5 paper bound.

MR. BENJAMIN'S SWORD, by Robert D Abrahams, a fictional biography of Judah P. Benjamin. Of special interest to adoles cents, 183 pp. Published by the Jewish Pub lication Society, Philadelphia, 1948. $2.00.

FIFTY ASSEMBLY PROGRAMS FOR THE JEWISH SCHOOL, by Samuel Sussman and Abraham Segal. With Index, 186 pp. Pub lished by the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, New York, 1948. $3.50.